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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Detente, European Defense and NATO

The declared basis for Europe's defense efforts, and NATO itself, has been the Soviet military threat commonly perceived by the alliance members. A prolonged period of detente--involving an increase in East-West economic and political contacts, plus arms control agreements probably at the theater as well as the strategic level--could therefore seriously erode both the efforts and the alliance.

Before examining this question, a certain fragility of detente should be noted. Detente reflects a fundamental state of mind about security, and untoward developments could alter that state of mind.

- Some East European state might begin to act so independently as to produce Soviet intervention.
- Inter-German rapprochement might reach a stage alarming to East or West or both.
- Some extra-regional problem, such as conflict in the Middle East, might impact seriously on the European scene.

Assuming, however, that detente develops undisturbed for a number of years, Western defense efforts and alliances are expected in many quarters to weaken progressively. This is indeed a real danger, but it is not an inevitable outcome. This memorandum examines some reasons why things might turn out better.

The Level of European Defense

The first question is whether Western Europe's military efforts will decline, over a prolonged detente, more steeply than the USSR's efforts.

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This has long been a standard American bugaboo. But in fact, the sense of diminished threat has been abroad in Europe for nearly a decade, and the predicted euphoria and military letdown haven't happened yet. At the moment, indeed, it is the Europeans who are worried about the over-eagerness of the USG for detente (as perceived by them in CSCE and especially MBFR) and the popular unwillingness to fund NATO (as manifested by the strength of Mansfield's position). Their own behavior in these talks shows some staunchness in insisting on real Soviet concessions if the bars are to be lowered.

For the longer run, the following seem to be the major tendencies:

- The smaller NATO members, who cannot believe that their own contribution to NATO is essential, are under real domestic strain in trying to maintain their efforts.
- The larger ones, much less so. They are very reluctant to increase defense efforts, especially while they still hope to retain the present US contribution or to negotiate Soviet cuts. But Pompidou, Heath, and Brandt are maintaining their efforts, and they are not on the defensive at home on this matter.
- They know that, for nations in their category, the political role they want requires an appropriate military establishment. The political competition within the EC requires each to keep up with the others in military terms. This in addition to the fact that they don't mean to become Soviet patsies.
- This was realized even by the Labor Party when it was out of power and trying to join the Market. Its behavior then--withdrawal from East of Suez and a slight boost in Europe-oriented efforts--is perhaps the best guide to the policy of a future Labor government.

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Unquestionably there is a European-wide desire to reduce arms spending. But the main EC governments give strong signs of stability and realism. They will bargain hard for Soviet cuts, try to keep the US fully involved, and seek economies through defense cooperation. But they are not likely to adopt, or be forced to adopt, policies which substantially change the continental East-West balance of power against them.

This does not mean that these countries will fund a military effort which satisfies their war planners. They may allow themselves to fall behind the USSR in certain kinds of modernization. Various ambiguities, such as those which for years have surrounded tactical nuclear weapons, may continue to be tolerated. They may persuade themselves that reserve forces are potent enough to allow some slippages in active-duty forces. But it is more likely than not that the major allied governments can maintain voter support for a level of defense respectable enough to sustain an attitude of independence from Soviet influence. This will be easier if the USSR trims its forces; if Moscow does the reverse, the detente assumption comes into question.

The Organization of European Defense

Even if adequate defense efforts are maintained under detente, it is another question whether NATO would continue as the organizing instrument of these efforts.

NATO as a mechanism serves the interests of its individual European members in many ways. In strictly European terms:

--it depoliticizes national armed forces, guaranteeing that conflicts within Western Europe cannot acquire a military dimension.

--it gives more security and bargaining power vis-a-vis the East.

--it gives smaller members an influence over larger ones.

--it provides a framework for cooperation which can make military efforts more cost-effective.

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All this would be true if the US were not a member. US membership brings additional advantages in Atlantic terms: access to US policymaking, substantial conventional contributions, tactical nuclear options, and above all a nuclear deterrent.

For an individual member, there are disadvantages. Each state is exposed to its partners' pressures to keep up its efforts. Sovereignty is of course diminished, as it is by any true alliance. From a certain European standpoint--and this is the attitude which France articulates--NATO gives the US an excessive role in Western Europe.

In European terms, it is hard to see how an individual state could find a preferable way of organizing its defense effort. The Swedish alternative attracts no one. The only real alternative is to opt for a home-guard type of low-level defense. This is not out of the question for one or two of the smaller members, whose governing coalitions are already under strain on the defense-vs-welfare issue. It does seem to be out of the question for the major members. Even for the wobblers, opting out would run against the tides of European integration in other areas, which are likely to gain strength in the coming decade, detente or no.

The Atlantic aspects are more problematic.

--If the US is obdurate, or if it places greater weight on bilateral relations with Moscow, access to its policymaking is not worth much.

--Its conventional contribution seems bound to decline.

--Europeans don't know what to make of tactical nuclears.

--Soviet striking power makes the US deterrent less credible.

The last point deserves more discussion. The deterrent has lacked full credibility for some years now, but the Europeans have seen no reason to renounce it on this account. Their sense of security

comes, not from how they appraise it, but from how they think the Soviets regard it. They reason that, so long as the Soviets cannot be certain the US will withhold SAC and Polaris from a European war, the deterrent is on the job. The less the general sense of threat, the less the felt need for the US guarantee, but also the less stringent the criteria by which it is judged.

But the reduction of US conventional forces seems bound to have important effects. It seems more likely to promote European defense cooperation than to trigger a general what's-the-use reaction and a drastic letdown of effort. The response, contrary to some current views, would not have to be a strategy and force structure viable by the tests of war gaming. If the Europeans showed they could make some positive response to offset the US cuts, and if the US made the right noises about its continued commitment in principle (including the deterrent), and if detente went on, the Europeans' sense of security--and therefore their sense of independence from Soviet influence--would not be much damaged.

But their sense of independence from US influence would be stimulated. It seems certain that the US, when it withdraws substantial forces, will be less heeded in NATO councils and in the concerting of Western policy on Eastern questions. This is going to happen anyway; troop withdrawal will magnify it.

And this could create room for a French return. Paris' objection has to do with who runs NATO. If the US ceases to, France can hope to do so herself. French re-entry might come via the Eurogroup or more directly, but France would probably see an opportunity to become the most important single voice on most European defense questions, as it now seeks to be on economic and political matters.

The European nuclear question is special. Even over 10-15 years, it is hard to see how the French and British could field, separately or together, a

force which would provide as great a sense of security as would that of the US, even given the problem of Washington's credibility. In addition, the effort to do so would raise excruciating problems of sovereignty and status among the French, British, and Germans. But this need not prevent modest French and British programs, perhaps loosely coordinated and regarded as supplements to, not replacements of, the US deterrent. A European parallel to the Nuclear Planning Group could probably be devised to ease German pain via consultation, while preserving ultimate national control.

This would not be wholly satisfactory, particularly to those charged with war planning. But the Europeans might find it preferable to any alternative, particularly one which risked loss of the US guarantee, and find that they had decided to live with it.

Which is, in essence, the story of NATO's life since the mid-1960s. Everyone has difficulties with it, but nobody who intends to maintain a defense effort can think of an alternative which doesn't raise more problems than it solves. Prolonged detente will change the composition of NATO. National weights will shift, and the alliance will be Europeanized. But nobody will see any virtue in renouncing the US deterrent, or in provoking Washington into withdrawing it--so long as the US does not act as though it still held all its old rights of leadership. Military viability will suffer somewhat, but after a decade of detente many other things will have changed too, and few will be overly concerned.

This outlook would be belied if one of the major European allies decided that its future lay in a separate arrangement with the Soviets, or if its electorate insisted on a severe cut in defense spending. These are not impossibilities, but there is little in the politics or culture of West Germany, France, or the UK to suggest they are likely.

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Indeed, the community ideal has already become a strong barrier against going it alone in any major field, and throughout Western Europe it is the pace, not the direction, of this trend that is in question. NATO can be one of the organs of this cooperation, so long as the US is willing to allow some Europeanization of the alliance and still make available its unique nuclear contribution.

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TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE 1 June 73
TO: D/OCI RL		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	
REMARKS: Written by me at Proctor's request. To go to the DCT along with [redacted] report about Brezhnev and 10-15 years of detente.		
FROM: DD/OCI [initials]		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	EXTENSION

FORM NO. 241
1 FEB 55
REPLACES FORM 36-8
WHICH MAY BE USED.

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